

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 EB-11 XMB-07 OPIC-12 IGA-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5191

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USDOC WASHDC

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB

SUBJ: TRANSGABON RAILROAD: UTILIZATION OF ENGINEERING
CONSULTING FIRM

ABIDJAN FOR REDSO/WA

YAOUNDE FOR RDO

USDOC FOR STEPHEN CONGER

DEPT PLEASE PASS EXIM FOR MALLOY

1. SUMMARY. FURTHER CONVERSATIONS IN RECENT DAYS CONCERNING ABOVE SUBJECT HAVE BROUGHT OUT THAT POSITIONS OF ITALIANS, GERMANS, LOCAL FED REP, OCTRA, AND RAWIRI FAIRLY FIRM AND CLEAR. POSITION OF FRENCH STILL UNCLEAR AND AMBIGUOUS. NEITHER GOG NOR FED IN BRUSSELS SEEM TO HAVE REACHED ANY FINAL CONCLUSION. END SUMMARY.

2. ITALIAN AND GERMAN POSITIONS: ITALIAN AMBASSADOR DA PRATO ONE HUNDRED PERCENT IN FAVOR OF JOINT TAMS/SOFRE-RAIL/BCEOM/ELECTROCONSUL PROPOSAL AND TOLD ME FEBRUARY
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5 HE HAS BACKING OF HIS GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL PUSH

PROPOSITION WITH FED IN BRUSSELS. GERMANS, WHO NOT YET INFORMED AND PROBABLY NOT YET AWARE OF SPECIFIC PROPOSAL OF TAMS AND COMPANY, HAVE REPEATEDLY IN PAST TAKEN STRONG POSITION IN FAVOR OF NEED FOR ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM. WITHOUT GOING INTO DETAILS SINCE GERMANS NOT IN CONSORTIUM, ITALIAN AMBASSADOR, LOCAL FED REP AND AMEMBASSY WILL URGE GERMANS TO PRESS MATTER OF PRINCIPLE WITH FED IN BRUSSELS.

3. RAWIRI POSITION: IN CONVERSATION WITH ME FEBRUARY 6 MINISTER OF STATE (FOREIGN AFFAIRS) RAWIRI WAS AGAIN QUITE FIRM IN HIS TOTAL SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL OF TAMS AND COMPANY. HE MENTIONED TO ME (AS I HAD BEEN TOLD EARLIER BY TAMS) THAT ELECTROCONSUL BROUGHT INTO CONSORTIUM AND THAT SOFRERAIL WOULD BE CHEF DE FIL. WHEN I ASKED HIM FLATLY IF PRESIDENT BONGO HAD GIVEN HIS FINAL ACCORD, RAWIRI ADMITTED THAT HE HAD NOT YET DONE SO BUT FELT CERTAIN THAT HE WOULD.

4. OCTRA POSITION: DIRECTOR OF OCTRA VION STILL TRYING BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS TO SABOTAGE PROJECT BY ATTEMPTING TO CONVINCE GOG THAT PROPOSAL REPRESENTS ENORMOUS UNNECESSARY EXPENDITURE AND BY VARIOUS DELAYING AND DIVISIVE TACTICS.

5. CASALTA POSITION: IN LONG CONVERSATION FEBRUARY 6 WITH CASALTA, PRINCIPAL FRENCH COUNSELOR TO FINANCE MINISTER MOUKAMBI, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT CASALTA IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT WITH VION AND DOING EVERYTHING HE CAN TO CONVINCE HIS MINISTER (WHO WILL NOT BE BACK IN GABON UNTIL LATE FEBRUARY) THAT PROPOSAL OF TAMS AND COMPANY UNSOUND AND UNNECESSARY. WHEN I PRESENTED VARIOUS CONTRARY ARGUMENTS TO HIM SUPPORTING ADVISABILITY OF EMPLOYING ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM, CASALTA RETREATED TO POSITION THAT WHOLE MATTER WOULD OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO BE PRESENTED TO FED FOR DECISION. HE ADDED THAT FED FEBRUARY 15 MEETING HAD BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL MARCH.

6. FRENCH POSITION: IN CONVERSATION WITH FAC DIRECTOR DUMONTET FEBRUARY 6, LATTER RESTATED POINTS MADE EARLIER TO ME BY AMBASSADOR RIBO, NAMELY THAT FRENCH AGREED THAT OCTRA COULD NOT DO JOB BUT THAT CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS FROM PARIS LACKING. WHEN I POINTED OUT TO HIM THAT RECENT ENTRY OF JAPAN INTO PICTURE (LIBREVILLE 0165) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HIGHLIGHTED URGENCY OF MATTER BEFORE OTHER DONORS BEGIN CONFUSING ISSUE, DUMONTET AGREED WITHOUT, HOWEVER, INDICATING THAT HE ABOUT TO TAKE ANY ACTION. FAILURE OF FRENCH TO BE MORE FORTHRIGHT IN SUCH AN IMPORTANT ISSUE OF OBVIOUS INTEREST TO THEM LEAVES ONE TO CONCLUDE EITHER THAT THERE IS MYSTERIOUS RIVALRY AMONG FRENCH FIRMS AS CLAIMED BY AMBASSADOR RIBO OR THAT FRENCH ARE PLAYING DOUBLE GAME WHOSE ULTIMATE GOAL WORKING WITH VION

IS TO ELIMINATE ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM OF TAMS AND COMPANY AND LEAVE ENTIRE CONTROL IN HANDS OF VION AND FRENCH ELEMENTS IN FED WHICH WOULD EFFECTIVELY PUT FRANCE IN CHARGE OF ENTIRE PROJECT. IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL AT THIS POINT WHAT FRENCH POSITION REALLY IS, ALTHOUGH LATTER INTERPRETATION (TO WHICH LOCAL FED REP GIVES CREDENCE) CANNOT BE EXCLUDED.

7. FED POSITION: LOCAL FED REP BRIZIO SHOWED ME FEBRUARY 7 COPIES OF TWO LETTERS. FIRST WAS ONE HE HAD SENT WEEKS AGO TO BRUSSELS RECOMMENDING USE OF ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM, MENTIONING SPECIFICALLY THE PROPOSAL OF TAMS AND COMPANY AND ASKING FOR CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS. SECOND LETTER, WHICH HE HAD RECEIVED JUST TWO DAYS AGO FROM FED BRUSSELS, WAS QUITE UNCLEAR AND AMBIGUOUS. IT REAFFIRMED PRIMARY ROPE OF OCTRA AS AGENT OF GOG, AT SAME TIME MENTIONED CONTROL RESPONSIBILITIES OF FED, REFERRED TO FERRANDI'S STRONG PERSONAL OBJECTIONS TO HIRING ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM BUT CONCLUDED THAT MATTER STILL OPEN. BRIZIO CONFIRMED TO ME THAT, WHILE FERRANDI STRONGLY SUPPORTS RAILROAD PROJECT, HE ALSO STRONGLY OPPOSES HIRING OF ENGINEERING CONSULTING FIRM. AGAIN, ACCORDING TO BRIZIO, CHEYSSON (WHO IS FERRANDI'S BOSS) OPPOSED TO ENTIRE RAILROAD PROJECT, ESSENTIALLY BECAUSE CHEYSSON HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN EARLIER FED PROJECT TO ASSIST CONGOLESE RAILROAD USING EVACUATION OF GABONESE MANGANESE AS PRIMARY ARGUMENT. CHEYSSON NOW FEELS THAT HE CANNOT SUPPORT TRANSGABON RAILROAD INASMUCH AS HE SUSPECTS (PROBABLY RIGHTLY SO) THAT GABON WOULD USE RAILROAD ONCE BUILT TO EVACUATE ALL ITS MANGANESE VIA GABON. BOTH CHEYSSON AND FERRANDI ARE FRENCH CITIZENS AND CAN BE ASSUMED TO BE WORKING AT LEAST PARTLY WITH FRENCH IN MATTER. LETTER FROM FED TO BRIZIO ALSO INDICATED
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